

**Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan
Thanksgiving Statement
Kennedy Memorial Center
Tuesday, November 22, 2011**

Thanksgiving is a most wonderful time. We praise God for His many blessings, as we gather with family and friends. Thanksgiving is also wonderful because this season inspires a generosity that brings out the best in people. Our presence here today exemplifies this spirit of generosity. I, along with so many others, are here to help Catholic Charities provide more than 400 of our New York neighbors a healthy and hearty Thanksgiving meal as our own families will be doing.

However, Thanksgiving is bittersweet—especially this year. The need for an annual distribution of meals at Thanksgiving reminds us that all is not right with our nation—and world. In 2011, our economy does not provide sufficient opportunities for all to support themselves and their families. Far too many across the economic spectrum are struggling, anxious about their next meal or keeping a roof over their heads. Our Catholic faith always turns first and foremost to the poor and most vulnerable. It is often the babies, the oldest and the newcomer who are most threatened. But at the same time, we recognize that too many are now “nearly and newly poor” and that anxiety and fear will sadly be a part of their Thanksgiving in 2011. The dignity of each person as made in the image and likeness of God calls us to do better.

Let me focus on three basic human needs and rights that our Catholic tradition—along with many others—affirm: food, housing and work. This Thanksgiving, our nation faces a crisis in all three of these basic needs. Too many of our neighbors are without homes or are at the brink of losing them. And too many of our neighbors lack decent jobs.

Work is a basic human right. We need an economy in which everyone seeking work is able to find a decent job that enables them to support themselves and their families with the basics of food and shelter. Without sufficient, decent jobs, individuals and families are threatened and human dignity is compromised.

Two weeks ago, right here in this Catholic Charities Center, we had to ask 25 people waiting for food to come back on another day simply because we did not have enough food. That story is not unique to this center, this neighborhood, to Catholic Charities. It is repeated at programs run by our partners and colleagues throughout the New York metropolitan area and across the nation. New Yorkers are hungry. Americans are hungry—and our emergency food programs do not have enough food to meet this need.

Much has been done. I am amazed at the generosity of so many sectors

of New York. This is a great blessing for which I praise God this Thanksgiving. I have seen the generosity of the business community in these difficult times. Even as tax revenues have decreased and cut-backs have been made—a number of which I have objected to—I still see an incredible amount of help being given to those in need in New York and throughout the nation by federal, state and local governments. Their continued support is essential. I see our Churches and Schools stretching further to meet needs. Our charitable, nonprofit organizations— Catholic Charities and other religious and non-sectarian organizations are extraordinarily effective in providing help and creating hope with limited resources. And yet more needs to be done so that all may secure the basic human rights to food, shelter and work.

I am proposing one specific initiative for our Catholic community that I hope might inspire others to do likewise. I am calling on every Catholic institution in the Archdiocese of New York—our parishes, schools, charitable institutions and other organizations— to join the FEED-OUR-NEIGHBORS Campaign and dedicate the last week of January, from January 22 to January 29, 2012- Sunday-Sunday, to increasing the supply of food available to feed hungry New Yorkers. Through a collection of either money or food goods, I am asking that we increase our efforts to ensure that New Yorkers who are hungry have enough to get by. As I do this, I want to recognize and praise the generous and dedicated work that our Catholic parishes and organizations—along with many others—are already doing. Without these efforts our current crisis would be much worse. This initiative cannot resolve the problem for it is impossible to make up all the reductions in resources. However, the fact that we cannot do everything is not an excuse to do nothing.

In addition, I am asking Monsignor Sullivan to work together with his colleagues, other food providers and government officials to see if there are ways we can develop together to better provide food to our hungry neighbors.

I end by borrowing from the Prophet Isaiah:
“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen;
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
And to provide the poor wanderer with shelter;
When you see the naked, to clothe them,
And not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
And your healing will quickly appear;
Then your righteousness will go before you,
And the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
[Isaiah 58]